

Leading Change

**A Summary of State Board of Education Task Force
Recommendations in Five Areas Vital to the Future of
Our Children, Our Schools and Our Communities**

Presented by:

**Kathleen N. Straus, President, State Board of Education and
Tom Watkins, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Michigan Department of Education**

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We live in a time of constant change. Each day brings advances in science and technology, major shifts in global economics, fresh discoveries in science, and new challenges to every citizen and community.

As always, our schools are a focal point—and a flashpoint—for the changes now underway.

Advances in information technology... A slate of newly enacted laws... Increasingly diverse students with equally diverse learning styles... A nationwide teacher shortage and a record number of retirements... These and other factors are placing unprecedented demands on educators and administrators.

Today, our schools are being challenged as never before—by parents, business, industry, and government—to provide every student with a full range of educational opportunities. Teachers are being asked not only to teach, but to prepare Michigan's children for life in the 21st century.

Within this fast-paced, challenge-filled environment, it is not enough for our schools to simply keep pace.

We must look ahead. Think strategically. Plan creatively. Assess carefully. Then act boldly on the best information available. We must **LEAD CHANGE** rather than merely responding to it.

That was the chief goal when, in the summer of 2001, Kathleen N. Straus, President, State Board of Education appointed five task force chairs to study areas of vital importance to our children and our future. Those areas included:

- Ensuring Early Childhood Literacy
- Ensuring Excellent Educators
- Embracing the Information Age
- Integrating Communities and Schools
- Elevating Educational Leadership

Where are we now? Where are we going? What must we do to assure that all of our children succeed? How do we improve chronically underperforming schools?

These were the central questions driving the work of each task force. After a year of focus groups, state-wide meetings and forums, polls and surveys, long conversations, lively debates, and in-depth research, the committees submitted their reports and offered their recommendations.

These reports address Michigan's key educational challenges head on.

They asked us to think in new ways by challenging our assumptions and traditions. And they presented us with exciting new possibilities, options and opportunities for making Michigan a national leader in education for the 21st century.

Education is everyone's responsibility.

These reports aren't intended just for our schools. They were prepared for every citizen, every business, every nonprofit organization—everyone who cares about education in the State of Michigan.

As a stakeholder in the future of our state and our nation, you'll want to know about the recommendations of these five committees. Once you've read the short summaries contained in this brochure, we invite you to **learn even more** by visiting our web site at: **www.michigan.gov/mde**.

*Our thanks to the more than 100 teachers, parents, administrators,
business professionals, nonprofit leaders, child care specialists, educational researchers,
and others who devoted their time and energy to producing these
blueprints for change.*

Now it is up to us

—as citizens and stakeholders—to shape a future in which

every educator is a well-prepared and highly motivated teacher...

every administrator is a confident and capable leader...

every classroom is a safe, state-of-the-art learning environment...

every university and college is an active partner...

every stakeholder is a dedicated volunteer and mentor...

and every child has an opportunity to learn and succeed.

A woman with glasses is shown in profile, reading a book. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange and yellow geometric pattern consisting of various rectangles and lines. The text is placed within these colored areas.

Challenges:

Reading forms the basis for almost all learning throughout life. It enables students to succeed in other subjects and to become well-rounded, well-educated adults. We know that children begin preparing to read long before they enter school and that they acquire a significant amount of language information before they enter school. We also know that over one-third of American children enter kindergarten without the early literacy skills necessary to be successful learners.

Given the fact that parents are their children's first and most important teachers—how can we help assure that every child will enter school well prepared to learn how to read? And how can we prepare schools to meet the literacy needs of all students?

Action Plan:

Among the many ideas and recommendations put forward by the Task Force were:

- A statewide literacy awareness campaign targeting parents and care givers
- Innovative programs that put educational tools directly in the hands of parents
- Tougher early childhood education standards and literacy benchmarks
- Dynamic partnerships with service agencies, libraries, pediatricians, and clinics
- New ways of educating Michigan teachers on best practices in early childhood literacy

ENSURING EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY

Sharon A. Wise
Chair

ENSURING EXCELLENT EDUCATORS

**John C. Austin,
Eileen Lappin Weiser
Co-Chairs**

Challenges:

Research shows—overwhelmingly—that the most important single factor in improving student achievement is teacher quality. This holds true for all communities, all grade levels, all socioeconomic backgrounds, and all class sizes.

Although Michigan is the nation's leading source of educators, here—as in every state—too many of the best new teachers are leaving the profession early in their careers. In addition, there are serious gaps in teacher quality

across the state, particularly in schools with chronically under-achieving students.

Given the fact that assuring teacher excellence is the most effective investment in education—what steps can we take to prepare, develop, recruit, retain, and support top-performing teachers?

Action Plan:

Here are just a few of the high-impact recommendations now being implemented:

- Rigorous new accountability standards for teacher preparation programs
- A public database monitoring the performance of teacher candidates
- Trained mentors, local team evaluations and videotaped lessons to improve teacher certification
- An all-out teacher recruitment campaign for chronically underperforming schools
- New pathways into teaching for teacher cadets, school personnel and mid-career professionals from business, industry, the military, and government
- Teacher professional development linked to student achievement gains and quality teaching standards
- Corporate partners who offer paid internships, job shadowing, tutorial programs, teacher exchanges, and sign-on programs
- A statewide “Teacher as Hero” campaign to recognize, reward and recruit educators

Challenges:

Information technology has fundamentally transformed our very way of life. Business, industry, agriculture, and government have all changed dramatically by leveraging the power of technology. Today's students—and tomorrow's citizens—need skills and knowledge that did not even exist a few years ago; and they must be engaged, skilled thinkers to excel in the global market place. An Information Age education has the potential

to individualize instruction, improve learning, and foster critical thinking for all students. Yet education has been slow to respond.

Given the growing importance of computers in every endeavor—how will we provide all Michigan students with technology-rich learning environments and ensure that our children will be equipped to succeed in the Information Age?

Action Plan

Based on a vision that stresses broad access and creative use of technology to improve student achievement, the task force made the following recommendations:

■ Educators and administrators will be trained to use Information Age tools and learning approaches

■ State standards and the MEAP will reflect the knowledge necessary for success in the Information Age, including critical thinking, and self-directed and collaborative learning

■ Schools will use creative new computer-based learning that stresses interactive collaborative, virtual, individualized, learner-focused, and just-in-time learning

■ Turn Michigan schools into year-round learning communities for students, families and educators

■ Create "Virtual Districts" that link schools across the state and world to share best practices, professional development, and learning experiences

EMBRACING THE INFORMATION AGE

Michael David Warren, Jr.
Chair

Challenge:

Schools and their communities are inextricably linked. They serve the same citizens. They have shared goals. In carrying out their mission, schools depend on the cooperation and support of community resources—from family members and neighborhood groups to local businesses, religious institutions, libraries, civic organizations, and government agencies. Research—and daily experience—demonstrate that schools do a better job when they are an integral part of the community. And vice versa.

Given the many mutual benefits to be derived from a close and creative relationship between schools and communities—how can we build the kind of connections that promote student achievement through collaborative thinking, shared resources, and dynamic partnerships?

Action Plan:

Here's just a sampling of suggestions that emerged from the task force:

- Allow greater flexibility in the use of school district funds to meet community needs
- Develop guides for identifying assets, involving stakeholders, building partnerships, marketing services, and raising community awareness

- Create models and multimedia tools for interagency-school partnerships and out-of-school programs
- Aggressively seek out grants and new sources of funding for community-school initiatives
- Provide training and discussion forums for community leaders and school staff
- Encourage school districts to create local plans for promoting and sustaining community-school collaborations
- Conduct a community resource audit to identify areas of potential collaboration

INTEGRATING COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

**Sharon L. Gire,
Herbert S. Moyer
Co-Chairs**

Challenges:

Gone are the days when school principals had the time to cruise hallways, observe classes at random, or chat leisurely with students, teachers and parents. Today's principal must be a curriculum expert, consensus builder, economist, legal expert, technology wiz, safety engineer, special education expert, grant writer, media liaison, and a specialist in everything from instructional design and delivery to state standards. The Task Force Report identifies the qualities needed to be a successful school leader. It also uncovers the managerial and instructional components of the principal's job, as well as the impediments.

Given the crucial role that principals play in the life of a school and the success of its students—can we find a way to identify what makes a good school leader and at the same time determine what those leaders can do to close the achievement gap among Michigan students?

Action Plan:

Among other recommendations, the Task Force decided to work toward:

■ Establish a system of endorsement for school administrators that acknowledges core competencies in instructional supervision, operations management and community leadership

- Create a state advisory panel to make recommendations regarding reality-based job descriptions for principals and a set of standards leading to principal endorsement
- Commit to an effective program of professional development that includes mentoring for new principals and on-going support for leaders of low-performing schools

**ELEVATING
EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP**

**Marianne Yared McGuire
Chair**

For full-text versions of the State Board of Education Task Force Reports,
visit our web site at:

www.michigan.gov/mde

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It's about our children. It's about our future. It's about time.